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ABSTRACT

Spelling words correctly in a separate subject curriculum is a rare procedure of learning today. However, correct spelling of words harmonizes well with the behaviorally stated objectives movement in that either a word is spelled correctly or incorrectly. Standardized and criterion referenced tests (CRTs) stress precise learnings in that machine scoring emphasizes answers be either correct or incorrect. There are several philosophies of education pertaining to assessing learner achievement in spelling. In the first, emphasizing behaviorism, a student is assisted in mastering phonic elements in the spelling curriculum. The second emphasizes a holistic writing curriculum. Contextual evaluation is necessary in holism as a philosophy of spelling instruction. With contextualism, learners plan objectives, learning opportunities in writing/spelling, and assessment procedures with the teacher. There are also eclectic procedures in teaching spelling which are in between behaviorism and contextualism. For example, the spelling curriculum may be harmonized with Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. To guide optimal student achievement in spelling, the teacher needs to use approved principles of learning from educational psychology. The psychology of learning must be stressed to assist students to achieve as optimally as possible. (NKA)

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Assessing Student Progress in Spelling.

by Marlow Ediger

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ASSESSING STUDENT PROGRESS IN SPELLING

When attending the elementary school years from 1934-1942, the writer experienced the teaching of spelling as a separate curriculum area. For each grade level spelling was taught daily for approximately fifteen minutes per day. When new weekly spelling words were introduced on Monday, words was generally written five times each to stress practice in mastery of words. Rote learning and memorization was involved here. I truly learned to spell well and won second prize in the McPherson, County, Kansas Annual Spelling Contest in 1938, 1939, and 1940. On Tuesday of each week, spelling words individually from the new list to be mastered were written in a new sentence. A fundamental assumption here was that the words needed to be used contextually, such as in every day writing. The trial test was given on Wednesday. Sometimes, if all words were spelled correctly, the final test need not be taken on Friday. Thursday spelling lessons emphasized students reviewing the correct spelling words in the total list as well as misspelled words from Wednesday. Good spellers learned to spell the bonus words from the spelling textbook. The bonus words were generally required for mastery learning. There were students who were truly challenged to master more words in the spelling curriculum. The teacher might then list additional words for mastery. When I think back at the lack of interesting methods in learning to spell words correctly, It is amazing how many students would reach out to master an increased number of words. Spelling words correctly in a separate subjects curriculum is a rare procedure of learning today. However, correct spelling of words harmonizes well with the behaviorally stated objectives movement in that either a word is spelled correctly or incorrectly. Thus, it can be measured readily if a word is spelled correctly or incorrectly. Standardized and criterion referenced tests (CRTa) stress precise learnings in that machine scoring emphasizes answers be either correct or incorrect. With behaviorally stated objectives, written prior to instruction, highly specific ends may be written and implemented in the teaching of spelling.

While being an elementary school principal during the 1950s, there were teachers who had charts on the wall to show student achievement in learning to spell words correctly. One teacher had a ladder to climb in chart form and if a student spelled ten words correctly he/she reached rung number ten on the ladder. The student's name then appeared on rung ten. Comparisons of learner achievement in spelling were then in evidence. Perhaps, these kinds of comparisons may be made with today's report card when comparing schools or school districts within a state on a state mandated test (See Ediger, 2000, 3).

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Assessment in Today's Spelling Curriculum

There are numerous philosophies of education pertaining to assessing learner achievement in spelling. A teacher might then assess how well a student is mastering phonic elements in an analytic approach in teaching spelling. Analyzing misspelled word may involve items such as the following:

1. noticing if a student is using phonics correctly to spell words that follow a consistent grapheme/phoneme relationship.
2. evaluating if a student leans too much on phonics for the spelling of words, such as irregularly spelled words-- though, thorough, and mow.
3. appraising if a student pronounces words correctly, allowing for dialect differences ---February instead of Febuary; spaghetti instead of "pisgeti," and bliss instead of bless.
4. analyzing if homonyms are spelled correctly in context--- hear vs here; and bear vs bare; among others.
5. paying careful attention to words that have silent letters ---knife with a silent letter "k," as well as "e."
6. assessing the many spellings of the "oo" sound such as in the word "to" -- blue, too, two, slew, slough, and stew.
7. differentiating the diverse spellings of the following -- "fer" such as in transfer; "fir," as in a fir tree, and "fur," as in a fur collar.
8. being able to spell words correctly containing the diphthong pattern, such as the "ou" letters/sound in out, about, shout, and doubt.
9. spelling words correctly with the diphthong grapheme/phoneme relationships, such the "oi" in oil, boil, soil, and coil.
10. indicating correct spelling of words containing vowel digraphs, such as in the following: hearth, heart, and loan. Each of these words has two sequential vowel letters with either the first or the second letter providing clues as to identity (See Ediger, 2000, 20-29).

In philosophy number one then, emphasizing behaviorism, a student is provided assistance in mastering phonic elements in the spelling curriculum. There are ten kinds of spelling errors in diagnosis and remediation which, when mastered, provide students the needed skills to become good writers. Phonic skills in spelling need to be taught sequentially. Thus, students may base new learnings on those previously taught. Students need to possess clarity on how phonics instruction relates directly to the spelling curriculum. Grapheme/phoneme relations need to be perceived as necessary for good spelling to occur. Analytical learning is in evidence when students learn to spell words from the part to the whole. Students achieve that which harmonizes with quality in education when elements of phonics containing regularly or irregularly spelled words are emphasized, according to behaviorism as a

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philosophy/psychology of learning. Each step of learning correct spelling of words is measurable if mastery has/has not occurred. Objectives need to be clearly written so it can be ascertained specifically if an objective has been achieved. Specificity of objectives is a necessary goal in writing behaviorally stated objectives. Alignment of learning opportunities is needed so that the precise objectives may be achieved by students. Appraisal should harmonize with the behaviorally stated, specific objectives of instruction. With the learning opportunities and appraisal procedures relating directly to the stated objectives, validity should definitely be in evidence. Validity pertains to a student being appraised on what he/she has had ample chances to learn. The appraisal procedures need to be clearly written/orally stated and be meaningful to the test taker. For methods of instruction, drill and practice may be used frequently for mastery learning.

Philosophy number two emphasizes a holistic writing curriculum. For writing experiences to truly be holistic, a minimal amount of time then needs to be given for analysis, such as students spending much time in learning to spell each new word using memorization methods. Rather, the student is to write meaningful content. Thus, the emphasis is placed upon holism in writing, not in studying isolated grapheme/phoneme relationships. Writing involving functional spelling is a key to improved communication. Within an essay written pertaining to an ongoing unit of study for example, the teacher may appraise with a learner a misspelled word and assist the latter to overcome the deficiency as needed in functional writing. Stress must be placed upon the writing of ideas, not segregated parts of a spelling word (Ediger, 1995, Chapter Five).

Contextual evaluation is necessary in holism as a philosophy of spelling instruction. With contextualism, learners plan objectives, learning opportunities in writing/spelling, and assessment procedures with the teacher. In context, such as in a writing activity, cooperative assessment takes place involving the student and the teacher. At the place/point a spelling error is made by the learner, assistance is provided as necessary, for the latter to overcome problem areas. Written products/processes may be shown in portfolio form. The student with teacher guidance may choose which items involving writing/spelling may be placed into a portfolio. A variety of contextual purposes in writing/spelling may go into the portfolio, including

1. essays to indicate achievement of objectives.
2. rhymed and unrhymed poetry.
3. business and friendly letters.
4. narrative, expository, and creative writing.
5. letters to the Editor.
6. advertisements.
7. an opinion on an issue.

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8. persuasive writing.
9. labeling and categorizing.
10. listing of items (Ediger, 2000, ERIC # TM 030739).

There are a plethora of purposeful writing experiences to stress in the classroom. Each experience needs to assist students to achieve objectives. However, there may be objectives that arise within the instructional sequence that are truly worthwhile to pursue. Not everything should focus on predetermined objectives, unless they are written in an open ended manner whereby flexibility is involved in choosing of learning opportunities through student/teacher planning. These opportunities are not chosen at random, but are perceived as being related to the ongoing learning activity. Thus, within an ongoing writing experience, students with teacher guidance may assess learner progress in spelling contextually.

There are also eclectic procedures in the teaching of spelling which are in between behaviorism and contextualism. Then too, there are numerous additional spelling curriculum decisions that must be made.

Multiple Intelligences Theory

Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, 1993) emphasizes that students may possess one intelligence more so that the others. He lists eight different intelligences. These include the following:

1. visual/spacial, such as in geometry. Here, students may label, write, and engage in correct spelling of words pertaining to space figures in geometry.

2. logical/mathematical as in arithmetic. Learners then may spell words correctly, for example, involving the writing of word problems in arithmetic.

3. verbal/linguistic which is the heart of language arts activities such as reading and writing. Within a reading activity, students may notice correct spelling of words as well as within a writing experience in attempting to do the best job possible of spelling.

4. musical in which correct spelling of words may be stressed when writing lyrics, chants, and words to accompany different kinds of music on the developmental level of students.

5. intrapersonal whereby students individually may work on projects and activities of their very own choosing.

6. interpersonal in which students may engage in cooperative endeavors involving written work with its inherent correct spelling of words.

7. body/kinesthetic whereby students may develop and perform bodily movements/dances to accompany practicing the correct spelling of

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words. One student teacher supervised by the writer modeled a tap dance to assist learners in learning to spell words correctly in an ongoing spelling lesson.

8. naturalistic/science whereby students may experience a hands on approach in learning and write related content on the physical sciences, the earth sciences, and the biological sciences.

The spelling curriculum may then be harmonized with Multiple Intelligences Theory. A variety of methods are available to the classroom teacher to assist students to become better spellers. Variety in activities used by the teacher attempts to provide for each learner in terms of intelligence(s) possessed.

Psychology of Learning

To guide optimal student achievement in spelling, the teacher needs to use approved principles of learning from educational psychology. By using these principles of learning, students should achieve more optimally in spelling. The role of educational psychology is to provide assistance to the teacher in guiding optimal learner progress. Thus, in learning to improve spelling knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the teacher needs to

1. actively engage students in the ongoing learning experiences. Being engaged in learning to spell, the student intrinsically is encouraged to learn. From within the student's perceptions, he/she then wishes to learn and not to waste time in the curriculum. Thus, the teacher needs to choose activities which engage each student in spelling. If intrinsic approaches do not work, extrinsic devices need to be used, such as providing inexpensive prizes to learners for achieving at a desired level in spelling.

2. provide quality spelling experiences for each student so that no one falls through the cracks. Failing is an awful experience in school. At the work place also, there are messages that need to be written in longhand whereby the level of spelling achievement will be revealed to others. Even if word processors are readily available, a writer or typist still needs to come close to the correct spelling of any word when using spell checkers. Otherwise, spell checkers cannot show the options for the correct spelling of a misspelled word on the monitor. Spell checkers only locates misspelled words and does not differentiate between homonyms, such as the words --- here and hear.

3. emphasize individual and collaborative endeavors in spelling. Thus, students may work by the self in the study of correct spelling of words, or work within a group. Perhaps, both should be stressed since people will write on a personal basis as well as work within a group setting. Another way of looking at this individual vs. collaborative work is

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to look at the learning style of the person, be it interpersonal or intrapersonal. Provide activities then that emphasize, in whole or in part, the learning style or intelligence of the involved person.

4. vary the learning opportunities provided to students. Here, both philosophies ---behaviorism and contextualism--- may be used as a basis in making these selections. Drill and practice should not be eliminated as learning activities, but should be used in moderation and as needed. Holism should be stressed much since correct spelling of words is to be emphasized within a learning activity. Spelling words correctly is done to make communication in writing clearer and more vivid. The teacher should look at the needs of individuals when making decisions in the spelling curriculum.

5. assess frequently to notice learner achievement. Frequent assessment also aids in making decisions on sequential learning for students. Sequence is determined by what the student has mastered and what is left to learn. In a logical sequence, the teacher makes decisions on the order of learning activities for students. In a psychological sequence, students are heavily involved in appraising their very own achievement so that the next sequential experience may come into fruition.

6. make certain that the learning activities are meaningful to students. That which is learned must make sense and stress comprehension. New words to be mastered in spelling in context or in isolation need to used in sentences to be meaningful. Words are the building blocks of larger units such as sentences and paragraphs. Syntax and semantics have important roles to play and for students to acquire in order to learn to spell words correctly and use each in a correct manner within a sentence. Syntax emphasizes correct word order within a sentencee. Generally, there is a singular word order for words within a sentence. The words --- horse, barn, the, ran, into-- form one correct sentence only, when viewing syntax or word order. Thus, the correct order of words in that sentence should read as follows: The horse ran into the barn. The word order or syntax then has meaning to the reader. Semantics emphasizes the meaning of a word or words which make up a sentence such as in the following: He looked the table over. There are numerous meanings which may be attached to this sentence:

a). He looked at the table to see how sturdy it was.

b) He looked at the table to see if there were scars which needed to be repainted.

c). He looked at the table to notice the kinds of foods thereon.

d) He looked at the table to determine how well it harmonized in color/design with the rest of the room.

e) He looked at the table in order to make a purchase after examining its quality.

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Words are more likely to be spelled correctly if meaning of each word is inherent.

7. establish student purpose for learning to spell words correctly. With purpose, students learn to spell words correctly for a reason. Improved communication occurs with words being spelled correctly and used meaningfully within a sentence or paragraph. The teacher needs to state reasons for students engaging in a selected learning opportunity. Thus, for example, students need to understand why a business letter is to be written or why a Letter to the Editor should be written as learning opportunities.

8. stress critical and creative thinking in the spelling curriculum. Critical thought emphasizes analyzing content into component parts. Content may be separated in terms of facts from opinions, fantasy from reality, and accurate from inaccurate information. When doing so, words are spelled correctly and written as sentences and sequential paragraphs. Creative thinking emphasizes students coming up with unique ideas or novelty of ideas presented in writing involves spelling words correctly. Higher levels of cognition need to be in the offing to encourage interest in writing and its component part -- spelling.

9. use alternative methods of instruction including inductive, deductive, problem solving, multimedia procedures, modern technology, audio-visual, project methods, construction activities, dramatization experiences, as well as reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences.

10. implement an integrated curriculum whereby spelling and writing cut across all curriculum areas (See also McClanahan, 2000, 479-486).

The psychology of learning need to be stressed to assist students to achieve as optimally as possible. Each student needs to attain excellence in spelling and the writing curriculum. A quality program of spelling instruction needs to be in the offing for all students. Provision needs to be made for individual differences since students vary from each other in spelling achievement and progress.

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